



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David Carlucci

## Senator Carlucci, AARP & Rocklanders Push to Create First of its Kind Statewide Utility Consumer Advocate

DAVID CARLUCCI May 1, 2014

| ISSUE: **UTILITIES**



VALLEY COTTAGE- Senator Carlucci stood with statewide members of the AARP, the Rockland Water Coalition and local Rockland homeowners to support the creation of a Utility Consumer Advocate in New York State. Currently ratepayers are left pleading with the Public Service Commission (PSC) to oppose rate increases which are constantly being approved by the Commission.

A 2013 AARP Utility Survey found that 76% of New Yorkers do not believe their interests are being represented in rate cases. A majority, 52%, said they would support a law to create an independent consumer advocate office to represent and protect residential customers when utility companies request a rate increase before the PSC.

Last year in Rockland County, United Water asked for help funding a desalination plant without illustrating a need for the facility. Now, the utility company is asking the ratepayer for a rate hike while ignoring their own financial and managerial issues - with both decisions to be made in another 2 months.

Rockland residents are already slammed with some of the highest utility rates in the nation and unemployment remains a serious concern throughout the region. To prevent future rate increases and to make sure Rockland voices are being heard, the group asked for Albany legislators to get behind the creation of a Utility Consumer Advocate.

Senator Carlucci said, “As it stands, New York residential consumers have virtually no one fighting for them against deep-pocketed utilities that spend over \$10 million a year - of their customers' own money, no less – to try to raise consumers' rates. A Utility Consumer Advocate will level that playing field.”

For years current New York State agencies such as the Public Service Commission as well as the Utility Intervention Unit, a division solely of the Department of State, have not worked on the behalf of consumers. The Public Service Commission mediates the competing interests of utilities while the Utility Intervention Unit operates under the direction of the Secretary of the State.

Currently 40 states throughout the country have a Utility Consumer Advocate where consumers saw drastic savings in their utility bills. California's Utility Consumer Advocate lobbied over 200 times on behalf of California consumers and saved them over \$4 billion dollars with the average ratepayer saving \$153 per year.

“Consumers need a strong voice at the same regulatory table where utility companies like United Water spare little expense to make their cases. In fact, utility companies pass those expenses on to the very ratepayers who then have to shoulder rate hikes,” said Beth Finkel, State Director for AARP in New York State.

Director Finkel continued, “United Water billed its customers nearly \$1 million from 2009 through 2012 for its costs to influence the state Public Service Commission. We need to level the playing field for consumers with an independent utility consumer advocate that has the power to sue, and AARP applauds Senator Carlucci, the Independent Democratic Conference and rightfully worried Rockland residents for pressing this issue. We will keep working with them until the entire Senate and Governor Cuomo recognize – as the Governor’s own Moreland Commission on Utility Storm Preparation and Response did – that their constituents need an advocate.”